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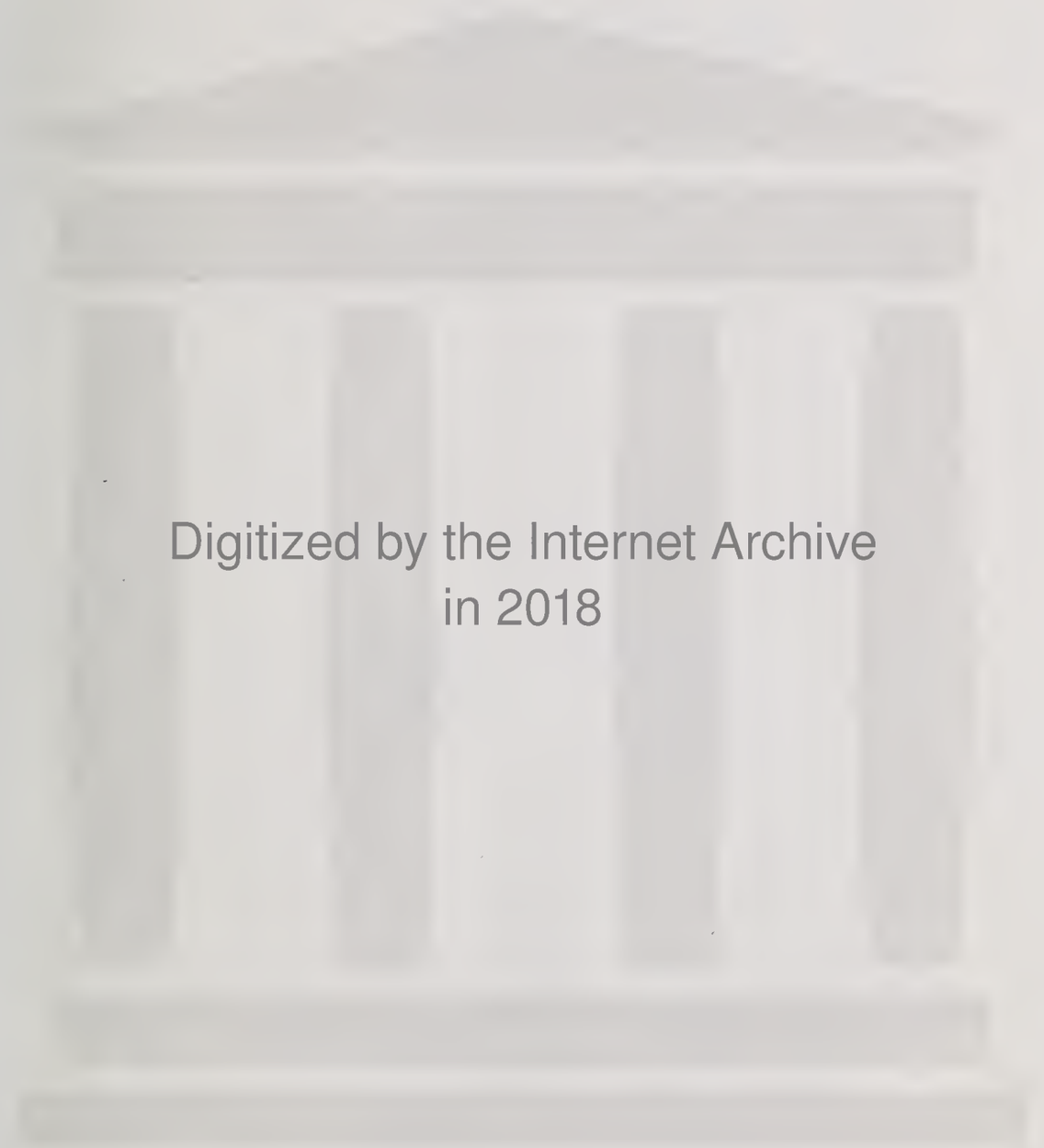

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# Augustus L. Ankeny

# Valeria M. Perin

*"We'll tak a cup o' kindness yet*
*For auld lang syne."*

By
Maud and Welker Given

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# Ankeny-Perin

AUGUSTUS L. ANKENY was born March 13, 1828, in Brownsville, Jo Daviess County, Ill., a son of John and Mary (Kimmel) Ankeny. His father came to Illinois from Pennsylvania ten years before and kept the first hotel in Kaskaskia in 1818, during the session of the first state legislature, that town being then the capital of Illinois. After the loss of the capital to Vandalia next year, John Ankeny, as his son the doctor once told the writer, became one of the "suckers" who got that name from coming north up the Mississippi in the Spring like the catfish, though his purpose was to remain and not return in the Fall like either the finny travelers or the summer workers at the lead mines. John Ankeny was one who inspired strong friendships among red

men as well as white and Chief Peppernong of the Pottawattamies came to his cabin in the night at the opening of the Black Hawk war, warning him to flee for safety, an exciting incident remembered by Augustus, though then but a small child. The neighborhood of the Ankeny home was overrun by hostile Indians soon after. John Ankeny and family took refuge at Galena; he and two sons joined the militia and served through the struggle with Black Hawk, being stationed most of the time at White Oak Springs, twelve miles from Galena.

At fourteen Augustus was sent to Mt. Morris College in Ogle County where he made a fine record. Later he studied medicine at Elizabethtown, near Galena, and afterwards at Rush Medical College in Chicago, whence he was graduated in 1849. Coming to Lyons, Iowa, in April, 1850, he became one of the pioneer physicians of the state. August 14, 1851, he was married to Valeria M. Perin who had been here fourteen years, having been brought as a child at the age of five when there was only one cabin in future Clinton. After some years of successful practice under the hard conditions of much travel over rough roads and the exposure encountered by pioneer doctors, Dr. Ankeny's health became impaired and he had to put his saddlebags aside. Thenceforward he became a real estate operator, his insight into the course of development in and around Clinton being such that he became and remained for many years the largest taxpayer in the town. At one time he was the owner of the sash and door factory that was afterwards developed into the Curtis Plant. Soon after the Civil War he became owner of the business building at the southwest corner of Fifth Avenue and Second Street, known as the Toll block, and which is still in the family. In 1859 Dr. Ankeny joined the rush to

Pike's Peak, and though his object was health rather than gold digging, he got the taste of precious metal mining that was to come out later and elsewhere, his ultimate development of properties being in the Black Hills near Deadwood and concerning such mines as the Buxton, Golden Reward and Portland. Most of these mines yielded well for a time and though proving refractory or of the "pocket" variety Dr. Ankeny, at the time of his death, had realized well on his investments even though the early promise of his mining claims was not maintained. During the civil war Dr. Ankeny served on an Iowa Commission for the restoration and return of wounded Union soldiers Frequently a delegate to republican state conventions the doctor was never himself a candidate for office. He was a liberal contributor to churches though not a member of any. In early years he was a dead shot and a hunter, he always delighted in fine horses and choice stock. At the time of his sudden death Dr. Ankeny was in France on a trip for health with Mrs. Ankeny and Belle. Taken worse crossing the British Channel he was carried from the vessel at Calais and died November 23, 1887, at a hotel before he could be undressed or put to bed.

The Chicago Tribune of November 25, 1887, printed on the editorial page an announcement of the death of Dr. Ankeny, word having been received by cable.

The children born to Dr. and Mrs. Ankeny were Helen, Maud, Bruce, Harry, Margaret, Frank, Belle and Mollie. In his time the family lived some years on the present site of the Clinton Opera House, later in what is now St. John's Lutheran parsonage, and for a long time on a country place a mile west of Lyons.

# Valeria Perin Ankeny

IN March, 1917, the four Perin sisters—Valeria, Nancy, Mary and Elizabeth—met in Clinton to celebrate their eighty years in Iowa and incidentally to sit for a group photograph which shows how young all of them were even then. They did not realize that we were just about to plunge into a World War that was to make everything before 1917 pertain to Auld Lang Syne.

Nor could they realize that the two of the group who lived nearest together and met daily—Elizabeth the youngest and Valeria the oldest—were to be the first to pass beyond. "Marmee" and "Kotsie" had even then several buoyant happy years left.

Valeria Perin Ankeny was born at Connersville, Indiana, near the Ohio line January 13, 1832. Andrew Jackson was president and Lincoln a clerk in a country grocery store years before going to Springfield The Perins had a relative named Isaac who was clerk and later captain of a steamboat running on the Ohio and occasionally up the Mississippi, who based high expectations on the location of future Clinton on the eastern bend of the Mississippi at the nearest point to the Chicago village at the foot of Lake Michigan. Uncle Isaac induced Noble Perin to bring his young family here in March, 1837, and they made the journey by boat. Valeria remembered how Joseph Bartlett, the one settler ahead of them, carried her from the

boat in a heavy snowstorm, her brother Samuel borne likewise by her father and Nancy by her mother.

The Perins made their home in the second cabin built here, which was close to the Iowa end of the present North Western bridge. The cabin had no floor at first and the beds were in bunks one above another. One side was swung on hinges. Valeria's father established a blacksmith shop and entered a good part of south Clinton as a farm, his fields extending west to about the present site of St. Mary's. Valeria had little recollection of hardship but much of pleasure in the pioneer life, recalling the toothsome game flavor of the pioneer table, the venison, wild turkey, prairie chicken and quail, along with the wild strawberries, blackberries, nuts and fish from the unpolluted Mississippi. Her father often went to Beaver Island to hunt deer. Little Rock Island was a favorite sugar camp. Valeria's mother brought some peach stones of high quality that developed into a fine pioneer orchard and withstood the climate wonderfully for years. Indians were a common sight and though occasionally frightening the children and women when the men were in the fields never did anything more serious than swiping a pan of dried apples at the Perin cabin.

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Pioneer hardships, if not sorrows, were early over with the Perins. Their cabin was soon improved and their relatives on the steamboat brought supplies from St. Louis and Cincinnati. But a year after the arrival in Iowa the uncle and brother Isaac, who brought them, in command of the "Missouri Fulton", was killed in an explosion on the steamer "Moselle" and six years later Valeria's father lost his life in the same manner on the "Potosi". This left Mrs. Perin in 1844 on the frontier with seven young fatherless

children. She met the situation with courage and success, rearing her family—Valeria, Samuel, Nancy, Mary, Elizabeth, Noble and Rachel—and living herself to ninety-four.

For about eighteen years the Perin family lived in the original log cabin and later in a frame house Mrs. Perin built a short distance south—a building bought afterwards by Valeria's husband, Dr. Ankeny, and moved to the site of the future Clinton Opera House on Sixth Avenue.

A girl of twelve when her father died Valeria's recollection of him remained perfectly distinct when she was much over ninety, especially of his many books and constant reading and how he would often pause to tell the little girl of thrilling events and strange scenes in foreign lands. It is notable how this interest was fed in later years and strengthened not only by the inherited taste for solid literature but by facilities for travel such as the father did not enjoy. Mother Ankeny had been married only a few years when the railroad reached the Mississippi and almost from the first she and Dr. Ankeny made occasional trips to Chicago to see the sights and attend the theaters of the young wonder city on the lake. Before the civil war she visited the east and immediately after it she went with the doctor by river to Memphis and thence over battlefields of Tennessee and Alabama where the wounds of war were fresh. In 1876 she attended the centennial exposition at Philadelphia and a little later as if for strong contrast made the trip by stage with the doctor to the Black Hills. This was repeated several times and her vivid memories of wild Deadwood were offset later by months on a cattle ranch near the plains when cowboys were cowboys. In her varied experience such

events alternated with trips to Boston and Newport, Washington and Philadelphia, to Florida and California and through Mexico with two visits to Europe thrown in—the first in 1887 and the last, which included a whole winter in Italy, in 1900.

Rich in observation and with memory marvelously clear and her serene good sense as marked as ever, her habit of reading continued much past ninety when she followed the events of city, state, nation and even the world with unabated interest. A characteristic anecdote was told of her when she had added a milestone to the ninetieth. At the time when fashion was prescribing extremely short skirts for young women she happened one day going upstairs to step twice on the hem of her dress when she paused and remarked drily, "This shows that these fashionable short skirts might be just the thing for me after all".

At eighty-five Mother Ankeny visited her granddaughter, Mrs. Brewer, in Cincinnati, attending the theater and enjoying the races. Asked at a social gathering if she had ever been in Cincinnati before and recalling the fact that her parents took the boat there for Iowa in 1837, she quickly replied: "O, yes, I was here eighty years ago."

Mother Ankeny showed no failure until late in the eighties when her hearing became impaired and she was subject to periodical attacks of facial neuralgia. Her mind was unaffected to the last. Jan. 12, 1924, her daughters in Clinton gave a surprise party for her at her home for her ninety-second birthday. The following day she came down stairs for the last time. During the remaining week her strength failed gradually although she left her bed and went into an

adjoining room less than twenty-four hours before her death. Twelve hours before the end all suffering stopped and she sank gradually and sweetly to sleep, renewing strangely the beauty of her youth in the repose of death.

"There must be pleasure in dying, sweet,
To make you so placid from head to feet."

The end came just at noon, Jan. 20, 1924, and the funeral services were conducted at the old home on the 22nd by the Rev. W. R. Agate, using the impersonal Episcopal service and Tennyson's "Crossing the Bar" instead of music.

After her passing, among Mother Ankeny's keepsakes were found, on paper fading with age and in the formal handwriting of the previous mid-century, a set of verses, signed "Lionel" and dated in Lyons seventy-three years before, beginning

"Valeria, fairest of the lovely fair,
Enchantress, mingling joy with thy sweet spell."

The first verse, dated January 13, 1851, expresses loving wishes for Valeria's birthday, while on the same sheet five others are added under date of January 15th, acknowledging a gift of wristlets and renewing expressions of admiration in the reverent and ceremonious tone of that day.

Until the last week Mrs. Ankeny fed the birds and cared for her flowers as she had done for more than three score years and ten.

"For auld lang syne, my dear,
For auld lang syne."

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